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# Momentum Building: Progress Towards a National OER Movement

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and linking cost-effective course content with student success, including initiatives from **Lumen Learning** (<http://lumenlearning.com/>) and **Robinson et al.**, librarians may be able to create assessment programs for our collections that directly impact curricular goals. Building library assessment around courses, such as explicitly serving the needs of specific courses, can be a measure of how we serve the community. E-textbooks could be the gateway to more direct support of library collections as part of the curriculum. Perhaps we would not need to be as concerned with storing multiple editions of the same text, which can take up feet of space on our shelves, and could thus be more involved in ensuring easy access to affordable print-on-demand and electronic resources.

In a similar vein, what if librarians should facilitate access to course content that results from the course itself, i.e., student outputs from their course experience? How would students learn from and experience content generated by their peers over the evolution of the course? Utilizing institutional repositories as content hubs,

as they already are, for these types of collections, is complementary in nature to open educational resources and demonstrates how the library plays a role in all areas of student learning.

Of course, there are tradeoffs. Finding that sweet spot of balancing the information needs of current courses with long term library collection goals to continue to serve our community is likely to be very complex. Libraries should not aim to create a comprehensive textbook collection of every textbook used for every course but should instead discern where the budget allocation will have the most significant impact on student learning outcomes and other aspects of student success. Textbooks are certainly having their moment in the spotlight with regards to the cost burden on students, and libraries can definitely play a greater role to alleviate that burden. Increasing discoverability of course content, promoting faculty adoption of affordable resources of high quality, and best serving the teaching and learning needs of our campuses are all key areas where librarians can take a greater role.

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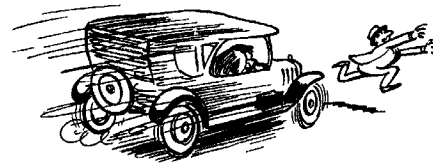
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## Momentum Building: Progress Towards a National OER Movement



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Two years ago we were privileged to share our individual and collective experience with Open Education Resources (OER) with *ATG* readers. We also shared a vision inspired by our observation of a movement in which a growing number of academic and K-12 librarians were choosing to advocate for the adoption of affordable learning materials at their institutions.

Similar to the advances made towards the growing acceptance of open access publishing options and data sharing, educators are slowly gaining awareness of OER as learning materials. OER include open textbooks, open courseware, and other educational materials that carry an open license permitting their free use and repurposing by others. Although a recent Babson Survey showed only about a quarter of U.S. faculty are familiar with OER,<sup>1</sup> we believe this will change as the power of academic librarians to support and increase faculty adoption of OER continues to grow into a national movement.

Our thinking that progress is achieved in greater numbers and with the power of collaboration is being put into practice with growing numbers of textbook affordability projects. For example, we recently joined dozens of colleagues from across the nation at the **Open Textbook Network Summit** to discuss, plan, and strategize for better ways to promote open textbook adoptions at our institutions, how to help faculty publish or modify open textbooks, and most importantly, what we can do to share and customize our own content for communicating the value of OER.

In this update to our original article we share those most recent developments, which to our way of thinking generate high enthusiasm for even greater progress towards higher education's transition to a culture of openness.

### Five Signs of Progress

**1) OER Librarians:** Over the past two years, it has become increasingly clear that OER have a place within the modern academic library. It is now common for libraries to have at least one member of staff who is considered the OER point person, whether that person is officially designated or simply someone who has taken an interest in the topic. Campuses are frequently adding OER to job titles and descriptions and seeking candidates with OER experience. In many cases, OER is housed within scholarly communications, taking advantage of the natural connections with Open Access. However, OER initiatives are also housed within access services, technical services, collections development, digital initiatives, or departmental liaisons — all of which intersect with OER in one way or another. As this space matures, it will be interesting to see whether a role for an “OER librarian” becomes fixed, the way it did for scholarly communications, or if OER simply becomes part of what the entire library does.

**2) Open Textbook Publishing:** Among the most positive indicators is the continuing growth of open textbooks and the number of organizations supporting their publication. While the exact number of open textbooks is un-

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known, as new books become available regularly, the Open Textbook Library has identified more than 260 titles from a variety of sources, many of which have been reviewed by faculty. Leading the charge is the **Open Textbook Network (OTN)**,<sup>2</sup> which is an alliance of nearly 250 colleges and universities across the country. The **Open Textbook Network's** growth in the last two years is nothing short of astounding and speaks volumes about academic libraries getting serious about achieving progress through collaboration. By sharing their resources to promote open textbooks, look for more institutions to report significant savings to students through open textbook adoptions.

**3) Community Growth:** In our 2014 article, we mentioned that we had identified librarians at 40 institutions who had an interest in OER. Since then, we have organized this group through a discussion list, which now comprises more than 450 participants from at least 150 institutions and more than a thousand posts.<sup>3</sup> The good news is that faculty and other academic support colleagues, such as instructional designers, are joining our community and working with librarians to advocate for and advance OER adoption. The **Open Textbook Network** is facilitating this process by recruiting faculty members to both conduct research on the use of open textbooks and participate in open textbook workshops targeted to other faculty to increase adoptions. Librarians who have had faculty from other institutions speak to their own faculty confirm that it is a more powerful and persuasive approach to engaging faculty on OER issues. While many faculty are themselves long-term creators and advocates for OER, we can do more when librarians and faculty work together.

**4) Visibility at Conferences:** Librarians have become an increasingly large constituency at OER-related conferences and events. Shortly after our 2014 article was published, we coordinated the first-ever daylong track for libraries and OER as part of the **Open Education Conference**, which is the OER community's main annual event.<sup>4</sup> The track achieved what we had hoped: not only did it draw a significant number of librarians to the conference, but it also introduced the OER community to the importance of librarians as partners. The track has remained a part of the programs in 2015 and 2016, and librarians have contributed at least in part to the growing size of the conference. The topic of OER has become more visible at library events, too. OER sessions have been on the program of many of the large library conferences, including **ALA, ACRL, Greater West Library Association, Library Publishing Coalition, Special Library Association, Charleston Conference**, and others. We expect this trend to continue to grow as more libraries expand their work on OER.

**5) Evolving Relationship with College Stores:** Librarians report that when advocating for textbook affordability on campus, faculty and administrators will sometimes ask how OER adoption will impact sales at the bookstore. In the past it was thought that there would be a contentious relationship between the college store and libraries advocating for OER adoption. It was assumed the college store would fight textbook affordability efforts as a threat to revenue. If the **National Association of College Store's Learning Content Ecosystem Website**<sup>5</sup> is an indicator, then college stores have grown to embrace the value of affordable learning material. This trend recognizes that the path forward in an increasing "open" world is to partner with faculty, administrators, IT, and librarians to achieve a better model for the delivery of learning content.

### **Libraries and the Evolving OER Ecosystem**

Alongside the growing momentum of OER in the library community, the broader OER ecosystem has been gaining momentum as well — and opportunities for library leadership abound. OER has gained support at the highest levels of government, with an explicit commitment from the White House to advance Open Education in the U.S. Open Government National Action Plan and the Department of Education's "#GoOpen" Campaign, which seeks to expand OER in K-12 schools. This support has translated into policy changes, as more agencies add open licensing requirements to federal grants to ensure educational materials produced by grantees are shared as OER with the public.<sup>6</sup> As these policies begin to become more common, academic libraries can play a role in supporting and educating grant recipients on campus — the same way that libraries have stepped up to support their campuses' implementation of public access policies for federally funded research.

Similarly, there are developments at the state and system levels. In the last two years alone, OER-related legislation has been introduced in more

than 20 states, and budget appropriations for OER programs have been approved in California, Connecticut, North Dakota, and Oregon. Statewide OER programs have emerged at the Board of Regents level in Georgia and Louisiana, and a national consortium of 38 community colleges recently launched an initiative to build OER-supported degree programs.<sup>7</sup> Academic librarians have critical roles to play in these initiatives as experts who can help craft successful plans and support their implementation.

### **Five Ways to Advance OER Right Now**

As an academic librarian concerned about textbook affordability at your institution, what next steps can you take to become part of the emerging OER ecosystem? Here are a few ways to help your library become a campus leader in promoting OER and textbook affordability:

**1) Plan an Institutional Strategy:** While the library could go it alone, you will make more progress more quickly by assembling a campus coalition involving multiple concerned partners, such as the campus store, teaching and learning center, academic affairs, disability services, faculty, students and others. Together an institutional textbook affordability task-force can identify multiple strategies to implement and work together to support faculty to adopt affordable learning content.<sup>8</sup>

**2) Know the Data:** Making a case for textbook affordability can benefit from presenting the latest research results and survey data to demonstrate the efficacy of OER and the latest trends in faculty awareness, faculty adoption, costs to students, etc. **Bell's OER Diigo Resource List**<sup>9</sup> includes links to many of these resources and adds new ones regularly.

**3) Join the Network:** Whether you become a part of the informal **SPARC OER Forum** that meets regularly to discuss OER issues or share knowledge about OER resources on the discussion list or the more formal **Open Textbook Network**, you will learn more and develop more rapidly as your campus OER advocate.

**4) Show 'Em the Goods:** Consider buying a set of OpenStax open textbooks in hardcopy and turn it into a portable display for your own campus OER roadshow. Take it to student and faculty events. Use it during Open Access and Open Ed weeks. Display it in the Library the first week of class when students are spending a fortune on textbooks. When they see and feel the open textbooks, it makes a difference and is a great way to start conversations about textbook affordability.

**5) Be Positive — Don't Demonize:** It helps to have a message that keeps you focused when talking to campus colleagues about textbook affordability. Make it an affirming, positive message that speaks to the social good accomplished by a campus textbook affordability initiative. Avoid speaking negatively about commercial textbook publishers, faculty that assign expensive textbooks or the college store. It's about creating partners, not making enemies.

When it comes to promoting the value of OER, it really does make a difference to "Think Global and Act Local." While each of us can make considerable progress as local OER advocates to create change at our own institutions, joining together as a national or global coalition to form an OER movement will bring about widespread change in the way educators think about learning materials. Despite the amazing progress made in the last two years, there is still much to accomplish in establishing a true culture of openness in education. 🌱

#### **Endnotes**

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9. Find **Steven Bell's** OER Diigo list at <https://www.diigo.com/user/blendedlibrarian/OER>.